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Conditions for Addressing Environmental Determinants of Health Behavior in Intersectoral Policy Networks: A Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

Improving health requires changes in the social, physical, economic and political determinants of health behavior. For the realization of policies that address these environmental determinants, intersectoral policy networks are considered necessary for the pooling of resources to implement different policy instruments. However, such network diversity may increase network complexity and therefore hamper network performance. Network complexity may be reduced by network management and the provision of financial resources. This study examined whether network diversity – amidst the other conditions – is indeed needed to address environmental determinants of health behavior. We included 25 intersectoral policy networks in Dutch municipalities aimed at reducing overweight, smoking, and alcohol/drugs abuse. For our fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis we used data from three web-based surveys among (a) project leaders regarding network diversity and size ($n = 38$); (b) project leaders and project partners regarding management ($n = 278$); and (c) implementation professionals regarding types of environmental determinants addressed ($n = 137$). Data on budgets were retrieved from project application forms. Contrary to their intentions, most policy networks typically addressed personal determinants. If the environment was addressed too, it was mostly the social environment. To address environmental determinants of health behavior, network diversity (>50% of the actors are non-public health) was necessary in networks that were either small (<16 actors) or had small budgets (<€183,172), when both were intensively managed. Irrespective of network diversity, environmental determinants also were addressed by small networks with large budgets, and by large networks with small budgets, when both provided network management. We conclude that network diversity is important – although not necessary – for resource pooling to address environmental determinants of health behavior, but only effective in the presence of network management. Our findings may support

intersectoral policy networks in improving health behaviors by addressing a variety of environmental determinants.

Keywords

Environmental Determinants, Health Behavior, Intersectoral Policy Networks, Network Diversity, Network Size, Network Management, Financial Resources, Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis